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C O N F I D E N T I A L VATICAN 000243

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/24/2016

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SUBJECT: VATICAN OFFICIAL PESSIMISTIC ABOUT PRC - HOLY SEE RELATIONS

REF: A) VATICAN 00185 B) VATICAN 00155 C) VATICAN 00212 D) HONG KONG 004288

CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher J. Sandrolini, Charge, AMEMB VATICAN, STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary: Holy See MFA Country Director for PRC Monsignor Rota-Graziosi is pessimistic about the chances for a break through on Holy See-PRC relations. Rota-Graziosi did not see the recent release of jailed Bishop An Shuxin as significant and was unfazed by reports indicating An had registered with the Patriotic Church. Rota-Graziosi's views are more pessimistic than those of the Holy See's de facto special envoy to the PRC, Archbishop Claudio Celli. This may indicate a philosophical split between the MFA and Celli, who operates largely outside the MFA's control. End Summary

Official Pessimistic on Holy See - PRC Relations

12. (C) Holy See MFA Country Director for the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) Monsignor Gianfranco Rota-Graziosi told PolOffs November 15 that he was pessimistic about any movement on diplomatic relations between the PRC and the Holy See. Rota-Graziosi, who traveled with Archbishop Claudio Celli to the PRC last July (see refs A and B), said there has been little movement on the issues dividing the two sides since the trip. According to Rota-Graziosi, PRC officials periodically intimate that a breakthrough is possible, but in the end, always fall back on the two main "obstacles" to progress: the Holy See's relationship with Taiwan, and its desire to control the naming of bishops.

13. (C) Rota-Graziosi repeated what is common knowledge: the Holy See would downgrade its relationship with Taiwan "overnight" with the right word from Beijing. In previous conversations we have heard Holy See officials express confidence that if Beijing had the will, the two sides could work out an agreement for naming bishops - perhaps such as the compromise arrangement in effect in Vietnam. The Chinese create the impression of progress in relations, but, in reality, nothing is happening. "They lead us around like a dog in a courtyard - it seems like we are going somewhere, but we never get anywhere," he concluded.

Bishop An Shuxin Controversy: "Insignificant"

14. (C) Rota-Graziosi did not see the recent release of jailed Bishop An Shuxin as particularly significant (ref C). His release means little, if anything, for Holy See-PRC relations said Rota-Graziosi. "The PRC releases someone and then they arrest others," he commented. Rota-Graziosi added that some in the underground church would probably have preferred that An remained in jail and serve as a martyr for the Church. As for

reports that An may have unwittingly joined the Patriotic Church, Rota-Graziosi was unruffled. "If An was duped into signing a document registering with the Patriotic Association prior to his release, we wouldn't hold it against him - we know that if it's true, he was tricked into it by the government," he said.

Comment: Divergence Among Vatican Officials?

15. (C) When evaluating Rota-Graziosi's opinions one must keep in mind he is generally pessimistic. He has covered these issues since 1988 and the frustrations of false starts and dashed hopes in this relationship have clearly worn on him. When we asked hopefully if the lack of illicit ordinations by the PRC since his July trip was a good sign, he told us he wakes up every morning and readies himself to see a newspaper article reporting just such an ordination. While recently-departed Vatican FM Giovanni Lajolo sounded a lot like Rota-Graziosi on China, the Holy See's de facto special envoy to the PRC, Archbishop Claudio Celli (ref B), has had much more optimistic views when we've consulted him. This may indicate a philosophical split between the MFA and Celli, a career diplomat, but one who is currently operating with more autonomy in a special position not directly controlled by the MFA. Vatican policy on China will now begin to take shape under new Secretary of State (Prime Minister equivalent) Bertone and

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Foreign Minister equivalent Mamberti, in office only since October.

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